

The Murder of Frank Hanes, 1939

An exchange of letters between Bernice Wims of Bossier City, Louisiana, and U.S. Assistant Attorney General O. John Rogge regarding the murder of Frank Hanes by his employer, Mississippi plantation owner Tom Alexander.

A typed transcription of Wims' first handwritten letter follows at the end of the three letters in this exchange of letters.

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101 Broadway Street
Bossier City, Louisiana
October 25, 1939

CRIM. DIV. F. SCHWEINHAUT
F. B. I.

Attorney General Murphy
Washington, D. C.
Honorable Sir:

OFFICE OF THE RECEIVED
CRIMINAL DIVISION
OCT 27 1939
RECEIVED
OCT 26 1939
ATTORNEY GENERAL

Nine unemployed Negro men of Shreveport were lured into Mississippi by the promise of free transportation and one dollar a hundred to pick cotton on the plantation of Tom Alexander, near Alexander. His post office address is Tallulah.

Frank Meyer of Howard Street, one of the laborers engaged, and owner of a truck, transported the others, having been promised pay for the service. On the arrival of the men, the truck was taken to the Alexander house. Log chains were put on the wheels and securely fastened there with locks.

Last Friday, after having worked a week's time, each man was paid exactly two dollars, no more. The men were told to buy their next week's "rations" on what was paid them.

One man, Frank Hanes, 446 Arlie Street, made a protest. Tom Alexander told Hanes to come to the commissary, which he did. Then Tom Alexander and another white man, set upon the Negro and

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beat him to death with ax handles.
Tom Elliot, 1036 Lawrence Street saw Frank Stanes
before he died, when he was too weak to speak, and
he saw his dead body. And he knows where the
body was buried on the Alexander plantation.

Five of the Negroes, who made a desperate effort
to escape, were found in a cane break by
Tom Alexander and a posse of his neighbors, the
next morning. These laborers were set upon and
beaten. In the confusion, one man, Tom Elliot,
1036 Lawrence Street did escape, and went by foot
forty miles into Monroe, where he got a freight
ride into Shreveport.

Tom Alexander's plantation Negroes are under
rigid control. They must report an escape. If
an escape is made without their having reported
it, then, they, themselves, receive a beating.

Tom Elliot is ready to be of any possible service.
He can identify the Negroes and he knows where
they live in Shreveport. He is appealing to your
Department to immediately protect his unfortunate
companions from the imminent danger of enslave-
ment and perhaps, death.

Sincerely yours,
[Mrs.] Bernice Wims

OJR:JL:mb

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NOV 10 1939

November 7, 1939.

Mrs. Bernice Wims,
101 Broadway Street,
Bossier City, Louisiana.

Dear Madam:

Reference is made to your letter of October 25, 1939, in which you describe the brutal treatment practiced upon Negroes by men on the plantation of one Tom Alexander, and in which you request this Department to protect such persons from further abuses.

The matters set out in your letter have been carefully examined and nowhere is disclosed a violation of a Federal statute to permit the intervention of this Department.

It is suggested that the conditions which you portray be brought to the attention of your State law enforcement officers for consideration.

Respectfully,

For the Attorney General,

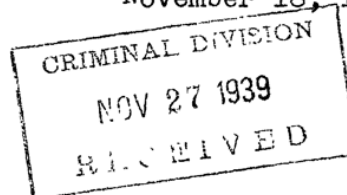
O. JOHN ROGGE, *O. John Rogge*
Assistant Attorney General.

Source: O. John Rogge to Bernice Wims, 7 November 1939, frame 0958, reel 9, *Peonage Files of the U.S. Department of Justice, 1901-1945* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1989), microfilm.

OJH-JJL:mb
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101 Broadway Street
Bossier City, Louisiana
November 18, 1939

Mr. O. John Rogge
Department Of Justice
Washington, D. C.
Dear Sir;



In replying to your letter of November 7, 1939, it is apparent that the Louisiana law officers have no authority to act as these Negroes were transported across this State line into Mississippi, where the crimes were committed. As far as anyone knows, the men are still being held, forcibly.

It would be a futile gesture to call the attention of the Mississippi law enforcement officers to this case. Negroes are not American citizens in the states of the far south. No public official would jeopardize his own position to protect a Negro in his civil or personal rights where the word of a white man is involved.

Although these charges seem incredible, they can be true. It is common knowledge that some white employers do whip their Negro employees; it is known that there is a peace officer who serves a beating with each arrest warrant to a man or woman of that race.

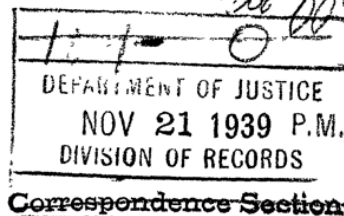
My own interest in this matter is academic. I have written a letter to make a report for another, stating the names and facts as given by him.

As murder and peonage are charged, it is regrettable that this man, Tom Alexander, and his son, can go on without danger of an investigation, as responsibility cannot be placed.

Sincerely yours,

Bernice Wims.
(Wims)

NOV 5 - 1939



Correspondence Section

M. E. D. J.

CPM 100 - 5 MANHATT

Source: Bernice Wims to O. John Rogge, 18 November 1939, frame 0957, reel 9, *Peonage Files of the U.S. Department of Justice, 1901-1945* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1989), microfilm.

Editor's Note: This is a typed transcription of Wims' 2-page handwritten letter that opens this three-letter exchange.

101 Broadway Street
Bossier City, Louisiana
October 25, 1939

Attorney General Murphy
Washington, D.C.

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[Mrs.] Bernice Wims